

The Level of Service Quality among International Students: A Case of Universiti Utara Malaysia

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Abstract: As the growing of the educational alternatives, the standard of institution was attracted to the students who need to experience a unique service provided. As the paper has studied the critical factors in service quality which consist of five dimensions included tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy that contribute to the most satisfaction by the international students in Universiti Utara Malaysia as they were expected and experienced. This study conducted in quantitative survey which using a set of questionnaire to 250 international students in Universiti Utara Malaysia. Among the respondents, male were 141 and female respondent were 109, 50.4% in a group between of 21-25 years old. Most of them from Asia continent indicated 69.6%. The data is analyzed and interpreted through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.0. As it was applying random sampling to determine sample sized. The result of high mean scores were about the lecturers research efficiency and productivity which labeled of assurance and the lowest meant score were responsiveness and empathy.

Key words: Service Quality • Assurance • Tangibility • Emphaty • Reliability • Responsiveness

INTRODUCTION

Service quality is become one of the most major research topics for the past few decades [1]. The existing of the satisfaction level with the service quality research and literature bring about various perspectives. The measuring individually satisfactions with the quality service in any departments are playing a crucial role in nowadays. Educational systems become services for the people who need to pursue their education both in global and local level, thus a local university needs to offer a standardized to be modified the education system. In the context of the certifying sustainability of higher learning education, institutions need them to continue the commitment for meet the student expectations [2].

In fact, in every university, the students are from every part of the world; means that they are from different countries, different background and different culture. Consequently, the perception and expectation may difference level. The student perception acts as a tool to help and increase service quality of the universities intensely. The universities have to understand its internal

strength and weakness and external opportunities and threats [3]. This study is about investigating the level of international students in UUM given agreement to the service provided. Furthermore, university can better develop in the future infrastructure when the number of students as a cause of service delivering to be more efficient and effectively. In case of the university is undertaking to challenge with the new competitors and need to go further of the new strategies, the study will help to focus specific problem that has been identified under five dimensions of service quality.

Literature Review: Basically, service quality in educational industry is identified based on the evaluation that students have been received as a part of educational experience [4]. This included the educational activities such as classroom based activities, faculty member which is student interactions, educational facilities and consults with the staffs due to studying matters. Many researchers have generated a service perspective [5], [6]. [6] pointed out that service quality is an external perceived which depend on their experience as they encounter to the services.

Table 1: Demonstrates Inclusive Descriptive of Five Dimensions in Service Quality

Component	Feature
Tangibility	Describe tangibles as physical environment, equipments and staff appearance. This dimension was viewed as the staff providing the best solution for communication related to make available in offers any relevant materials which the student is convenient to solving around the problems that are dealing with.
Reliability	Describes reliability as ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. This dimension was viewed as accurate service which is the customer view the services provided reliable or perfect.
Responsiveness	Described responsiveness as willingness to help students and provide prompt service. It was also viewed as staff assistance which is the help offered to students in obtaining what they need in the university
Assurance	Describes assurance as "knowledge and courtesy of staffs and their ability to inspire trust and confidence" which is the people rendering the services to customers have the attribute of knowledge and ability to inspire trust and confidence.
Empathy	Described empathy as caring, individual attention the firm provides its customers. This dimension was viewed as welcoming staff which is the people rendering the services to customers have these attribute of care and concern

Source: [12]

However, [7] stated that service quality is not associated with service only but it involved to the delivery process. Hence, the people who involved in the process of redesign and commitment were important to produce services. Another research about service quality is presented by [8] who focused on the comparison model between customer expectations of the service and their experience of the previous service received. Nevertheless, there were another effort to look upon higher institution administration such the study by [4] as many different faculties and administration service tried to measure based on registration perception and academic advising in order to ensure a positive quality service that compliment implemented on academic [5, 9].

The most prevailing perception accepted on service quality is the instrument of SERVQUAL model. According to [10] first listed ten determinants of service quality that can be generalized to any type of service. The ten dimensions include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding. Ultimately, ten dimensions were grouped into five dimensions in the SERVQUAL model by [6] which consist of assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility. Previous research also done by [11] and it also long proved by [10].

Finally, the study of [13] was well explained as the assurance has been recognized as the most important signifying that students are most concern with the knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence which is part of the assurance dimension. Nevertheless, there were studies that have different view on the significance of tangibility in service quality as well.

Therefore, various researchers have been studied about service quality in the higher education as based on students receive in academic experience which can be difference view of personal perspective under five dimensions. Thus, it depends on university services

provided whether students would very concern on assurance and tangibility or other dimensions as the literature above proved.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is design to seek out the level satisfaction under independent variables of international students in UUM. Data is collected through questionnaire survey as it is a pre-formulated recorded series to which the respondents giving their answers usually within rather closely defined alternatives [14]. The instrument conducted in this study is SERVQUAL by having five dimensions which consisted of 37 items scale as it adopted from [15]. It used a 5 point of Likert scale to measure the five dimensions ranging from 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 degree and 5 strongly agree. The data is analyzes and interpreted through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.0 in order to produce descriptive statistics.

As the Cronbach's alpha coefficientis the most commonly types of measure of internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for the variables in this study are all well above 0.60. The study is uses the random sampling in this study since the technique has an advance to ensure that the sampling process is an unbiased because every individual has a same chance in chosen as mentioned above. Moreover, a total of 250 questionnaires were direct distributed to international students in UUM, consequently 250 were replied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the illustration of Table 2, the data of demographic factor includes the profile of participants which are gender, age and continent. The information is

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondent's profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	141	56.4
	Female	109	43.6
Age	<20years	90	36.0
	21-25years	126	50.4
	26-30years	27	10.8
	>30years	7	2.8
Continent	Asia	174	69.6
	Africa	74	29.6
	America	1	.4
	Australia	1	.4

presented on above table demonstrates the frequency distributions and percentages. From 250 of respondents in this study as 56% recorded were 141 male respondents and another 43.6% were distributed 109 female respondents. Most of respondents were the age between of 21-25 years old as it distributes about 50.4%, While 36% were distributed to respondents who were less than 20 years old, followed by between 26-30 years old were about 10.8%. And 2.8% of the minority illustrated for the respondents who were the age above 30 years old. Besides, there were 69.6% of respondents who were from Asia continent, 29.6% recorded for Africa continent, followed by 0.4% of America and Australia continent as well. Astonishingly, this table demonstrates the existing number of international students who were studied in Universiti Utara Malaysia as there are experienced in services as the university provided.

Based on Table 3 illustrated the mean and standard deviation of service quality scale. They consisted of five dimensions which tangibility, reliability, responsibility, assurance and empathy. There were 37 items under an independent variables and it showed that 4 highest mean score for the all items were *“Lecturers’ research efficiency and productivity”* recorded 3.85 which under the assurance dimension that students were strong agree on the service quality, followed by three items that under tangibility which are *“Members of faculty are well dressed”* recorded as 3.84, *“Support staff are well dressed”* recorded as 3.82 and at the same time *“Uses modern equipment and technology”* scored as 3.81. While there were 8 items scored mean value between 3.61-3.80 (*Classes take regularly, Felt safe in learning environment, Degree of university involve with the community, Materials visually appealing, Availability of lecturers to assist you, Lecturers are sympathetic and supportive to the specific needs of students, Lecturers capability in teaching, Physical facilities visually appealing*).

However, the most of items were scored the mean value in this group between 3.40-3.60 which 23 items under five dimensions of independent variables included *“Staff understood your specific needs”, “Staff gave you individual attention”, “Support staff told exactly when services were done”, “Support staff performed service right first time”, “University are fair and unbiased in individual treatment”, “Staff gave prompt services to you”, “Support staff maintained error free records”, “Support staff have the knowledge to answer your questions”, “Support staff are consistently courteous to you”, “Staffs responded to requests promptly”, “Support staff provided services at time promised”, “Staffs are capable to solve problems”, “Operating hours were convenient for you”, “Inquiries are dealt with efficiency and promptly”, “Access to study room is accommodate with students’ convenient”, “The university maintained error free records”, “Lecturers showed honest interest solving your problem”, “Faculty provided services at time promised”, “Availability of personnel to assist you”, “Faculty behavior instilled confidence in you”, “Faculty consistently were polite with you”, “Support staff behavior instilled confidence in you”, “Access to computer facilities is accommodate with students’ convenient”.*

Reversely, it can be seen on the table 3 as there were 2 items of independent variables which scored mean value at 3.32 consist of *“Staff had your best interests in heart”* which classified under empathy and *“Channels for expressing student complaints are ready available”* was under responsiveness dimension. These two items were indicated the lowest mean value as the international students were given on 5 point Linkert scale in the dimension of services provided by the University.

Besides, the study of mean value scored in the table 3 which ranged from 3.220-3.856 as presented to be lowest to highest score in the independent variables. However, the score of standard deviation demonstrated in the table as reasonably high in the range of 0.763-2.110 which proposed some discrepancy to the agreement about the service quality items among the respondents.

The findings exposed a high mean value among international students in Universiti Utara Malaysia as it implied that the strong mean of assurance dimension in service quality has been practiced in term of the abilities to inspired the students to trust and confident in what the knowledge that staffs have been given. This showed that the international students are well experienced with assurance and other services by all genders, age groups

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of 5 Dimensions in Service Quality

	Mean	SD
Use modern equipment and technology	3.812	0.816
Physical facilities visually appealing	3.620	0.833
Materials visually appealing	3.732	0.768
Other people find it easy to confide in me	4.582	0.630
Support staff are well dressed	3.824	0.923
Members of faculty are well dress	3.840	0.908
Lecturers capability in teaching	3.656	0.945
Lecturers showed honest interest solving your problem	3.560	0.877
Support staff provided services at time promised	3.488	0.962
Support staff performed service right first time	3.432	0.912
	Mean	SD
Faculty provided services at time promised	3.564	0.903
Classes take regularly	3.776	0.912
The university maintained error free records	3.552	0.840
Channels for expressing students complaints are ready available	3.324	0.911
Support staff told exactly when services were done	3.432	0.862
Staff gave prompt services to you	3.448	0.806
Staffs are capable to solve problems	3.516	0.906
Inquiries are dealt with efficiency and promptly	3.524	0.878
Staffs responded to requests promptly	3.488	0.892
Availability of personnel to assist you	3.576	0.885
Availability of lecturer to assist you	3.720	0.841
Felt safe in learning environment	3.752	0.924
Support staff behavior instilled confidence in you	3.592	0.836
Support staff are consistently courteous to you	3.480	0.827
Support staffs have the knowledge to answer your questions	3.460	0.864
Faculty behavior instilled confidence in you	3.576	0.763
Faculty consistently were polite with you	3.580	0.880
Lecturers research efficiency and productivity	3.856	2.014
Degree of university involve with the community	3.748	0.871
University are and unbiased in individual	3.440	2.110
Staff had your best interests in heart	3.320	0.897
Operating hours were convenient for you	3.524	0.874
Staff gave you individual attention	3.432	0.955
Staff understood your specific needs	3.404	0.896
Lecturers are sympathetic and supportive to the specific needs of students	3.648	0.799
Access to computer facilities is accommodate with students' convenient	3.596	0.860
Access to study room is accommodate with students' convenient	3.548	0.918

and different of continents from the staffs within university. Meanwhile, the findings of lowest items were revealed such staffs carried responsiveness of services relatively unwilling to provide a prompt service, for the empathy seems like the students disagree in the caring individual attention when staffs provide services.

The suggestions are that university should enhance staffs potential in order to response when students needs help, giving them confident knowledge when problem met and giving best attention to solve problem while in providing services. Moreover, university should have the training program and workshop to the service providers as they need to learn the challenges when troubles are met, how to deal with confident knowledge to inspire student believe in that information provided, in training

program should guide the way that the staff has to caring individual attention with the best heart and show the important case that would effect to the university reputation as well. This because of the service provider is a part of university's image to attract the new numbers of students and it proved when it comes to management viewed.

CONCLUSION

As the results clearly indicated that the assurance is the highest score in the service quality among the international students experienced with university provided such the sufficiency of lecturers' research and productivity in which students use it as references in

lesson as the literature from the scholars above mentioned. While other dimensions like tangibility and reliability labeled as static services as students were agree that the university and staffs provided proper level likes the equipment that provided in the accommodation and the learning environment is safe and comfortable to make study interested. However, the last two dimensions that the items were lowest mean values which are responsiveness and empathy as what other literature suggested improving the services to concern the management that should emphasize standard services in order to compete and attract from outsiders to study here. From this study is limited in the context of respondent that should offer to the future research in paving toward in term of investigate the service quality in the private and public university as they were differences in services quality as to increase the findings and should consider the accessibility to the data collection as well.

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